

The Story of VOP

How Veterans of Pakistan was formed...

Brig (Retd) Mian Muhammad Mahmud - 19 March 2023

The basic question that arises is what is the need of having such an association? The simple answer is that our country is drifting away from its main goals, objectives, promises and aspirations for which it was created.



We as part of the armed forces and in particular the Army, have to be held largely responsible for this gradual decline. All other sections of society have also had their share of enthusiastic cohorts, who fully inspired, goaded, connived, endorsed and faithfully participated in all these ill-advised policies and actions that have brought us to this pass. Needless to go into the background and the details, we must all in real earnest seek forgiveness and offer unqualified apologies, for all our omissions and acts that have caused this debacle. It is worth mentioning that some of our illustrious colleagues, showed the courage and the will to oppose all such acts of subversion of the constitution. They did so by remaining in the norm of military discipline and upholding the oath that they took at the time of their graduation from the Pakistan Military Academy. They paid a heavy price. Their bright career was jeopardized and terminated at the whims of those in Command. We want to recognize their strength of character and the principled position that they took. They will remain the unsung heroes of this Army. We salute them.

The military coup staged by General Parvez Musharraf and his small coterie of generals, was just a repeat of those acts in the past. The ex-servicemen community, like all other sections of the society, failed to condemn this unconstitutional and illegal act in the terms that it deserved. This apathy has been the main failings of us all, as a nation, as responsible citizens, as those whose duty should have been to stand up and speak against all such ill-advised acts.

All cross sections of the society, owe it to this country that they must find the courage and conviction to condemn and speak loudly against all such crimes and misdeeds.

The events of 9/11 saw a bizarre set of development in the corridors of power. It is amazing as to how a military dictator, took such critical decisions, which were to literally change the destiny of the country, all by himself. No clear and loud voices were raised either within or outside the Military establishment. This is the biggest dilemma that we have been facing as a Nation. Who has given the Army chief this power? Even within the Armed Forces he has equal peers in the form of Chairman Joint Chief of Staff, Air force and Naval chiefs. It is time that we put a permanent end to all such military adventurers. Those who committed this kind of crimes and their close collaborators must be held accountable. It is time that they must face a judicial commission.

At this time of our national history the well-meaning, sincere patriotic citizens, who had well informed judgment, began to agitate their minds. The folly of the abrupt and ad-hoc decisions being taken started to unravel itself. It was in early April, 2003, that a small group got together to discuss the seriousness of the problems to give vent to their concerns. The letter inviting 23 senior citizens, who shared the gravity of the situation, was circulated for their attention and action if they deemed it fit.

It was most heartening that except for four all turned up. It was decided that a letter should be sent to General Musharraf, seeking for a time for our delegation to meet with him. Unfortunately, before this could be done, two of our illustrious colleagues Air Chief Marshal Zulfikar Ali Khan (Retd) and Major General (Retd) Rao Farman Ali died and some others had serious sickness in their immediate families. The initiative thus died. It was to the utter frustrations of all such like-minded people. The letter sent and the list of invitees is placed on record: -

29, Westridge -1
Rawalpindi
Tel: 5470669, 5464721
19 April, 2003

My dear,

Pakistan has a history that our leaders remain imperiously indifferent to the impending crisis. We realize its gravity when the events have over-taken us.

The International events have been casting their shadows on Pakistan's horizons for the last two years. These shadows seem to be lengthening with every passing day. The message that they bring in their wake, seems to have serious connotations and far-reaching implications for our country.

It is imperative that every patriotic, sincere, and loyal citizen of Pakistan, who has the love of the country at heart, should agitate his mind and grasp the manifestations of the implicit threat that these International Power Games hold for us. More importantly, a consensus needs to be devolved urgently as to what we need to do to prepare ourselves and to brace up to meet these challenges.

To hold an in-depth open discussion of all these serious repercussions that these grave developments imply for us, a meeting of a small group is being proposed to be held. The names are being picked up through informal consultations with a wide cross section of the society. Later any other eminently suitably qualified persons could be added if so desired.

The first proposed meeting is being held on 30, April, 2007, at 10.00 Hrs, at 29, Westridge-1, Rawalpindi. The names of the participants being requested to attend the meeting are attached. A confirmation will be much appreciated.

Thanks

Yours Sincerely

Brig (Retd) M. M. Mahmud

Air Chief Marshal @ M. Zulfikar Ali Khan
General @ Sowar Khan
Lt. General @ Faiz Ali Chishti
Air Marshall @ Inam -Ul- Haq
Lt. General @ G.S Butt
Lt. General M Tariq S J
Lt. General @ Maqbool
Major General @ Farmaan Ali
Major General @ N.K Babar
Major General @ Shafiq Ahmad
Major General @ M. Imtiaz Ali
Major General @ A. Zuberi
Major General @ S.M.Z Askree
Brig M. Saleem Ullah
Mr. Ashtar Ansaf Ali
Mr. S.K Mahmud
Dr. Zafar Altaf
Mr. Justice Afzal Lone
Mr. Shafi Niaz
Brig @ Muhammad Yusuf
Group Captain Anwar

In March 2007, that the lawyer's movement suddenly brought in a new ray of hope to the disgruntled, demoralized and disillusioned citizens of the country. All sections started to mobilize behind this new spirit of awakening. The response of the ex-servicemen was rather disappointing. It was lone person of Lt Gen (Retd) Hameed Gul who figured prominently. The rest of the community was conspicuously disassociating itself and remaining as silent spectator in these times of trials and tribulations

At this stage the ex-servicemen, in their own small groups, began to ponder over the grave damage that the repeated Martial Laws had done to this country. These were destroying the moral, ethical and logical fabrics of our nationhood. There was a simmering of the guilt that we as a community, either as serving or later as ex-servicemen, were remained as indifferent and silent spectators to all these morbid developments.

It was in November 2007, at an informal get together of the course mates of 1st PMA Long course that these serious concerns again surfaced and were raised. It was decided that a letter should be addressed to the COAS, in which briefly the gravity of the situation should be highlighted. There was a strong feeling that the proud image of the armed forces, in particular the army, had been badly tarnished. A letter was drafted. Before it could be signed and dispatched, Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto was assassinated. In these sudden and tragic changes in our body politics, it was considered advisable to wait and watch.

A copy of the drafted letter is as below:-

General Ashfaq Parves Kayani
Chief of the Army Staff
General Headquarters
Rawalpindi

Subject: The Spirit Of National Will

Dear General,

This brief submission comes from the 1st PMA Long Course. We rightfully feel and take the pride that we have the singular honor of being the pioneers of Pakistan Military Academy. With this we imbibed the spirit of the people of Pakistan in the creation of this country and the Army. We had no colonial legacy of our seniors, who had served the British crown. Our young and impressionable minds were submerged in the achromatic sentiments of the masses who had struggled for this country.

It is in this spirit that we joined the Army and gave it, whatever best we had in us. We can proudly reflect our humble but highly committed and dedicated services in the 1965 and 1971 wars. It is the unique distinction that our course earned; one Nishan-I-Haider and three Sitara-I-Jurat. The course history is reminiscent of many acts and deeds which do us proud. The Army and the country can equally share this sense of admiration and adulation.

This brief presage is essentially to bring out that our hearts have been throbbing for the cause and the glory of this great country. Even to-day our anxiety is towards that goal and end.

It is with these feelings that we beseech you to equally share these sentiments with us and keep these uppermost in your heart and mind. The love of the country demands that in these defining moments, this should be the cause, the will and the guiding principles of thought and action for us all. We have lived our lives with these motivations and would like to be buried with this spirit and thoughts.

This is the message that we have. It is a voice of sanity. It is a call for unity. It edifies that the cause and the interests of the Country and the Army should be understood to be synonymous and synthetic with each other. It is the collective will of the people which determines the future of a Nation. No other individual has the right to impose his will and charter the destiny of the country.

We trust your judgment. We pray that may Allah give you the guidance to choose the path that can enshrine the security and the future of the country.

Thanks, and best regards.

Sincerely,

We the 1st PMA Long Course

As the gory game plan of Musharraf began to unfold itself, the need to arrest these nefarious designs, surged in the hearts and minds of ex-servicemen with a new vigor and enthusiasm. A group of 22 officers met and resolved that ex-servicemen community must be activated and mobilized. There was the dire need to stand along with all other sections of the civil society. It was decided that the lawyer's movement for the removal of Musharraf and the restoration of the judiciary must be fully supported. This small group, acting in the spirit of the nine Founding Fathers of the American History, resolved to make a humble but a committed and dedicated start. These officers voluntarily donated funds, offered their time and services to give this effort a jump start.

Since Pakistan ex-servicemen society, too was expressing their anxiety on this grave development, it was decided that we make a common cause with them. These efforts had to be galvanized and given a meaningful direction. It needed a leadership of stature. To provide that. Air Marshal (Retd) M. Asghar Khan and Air Marshal (Retd) M. Nur Khan, were approached by Brig (Retd) Mahmud. Despite their age and their strong reservations about Lieutenant General (Retd) Chistie, they graciously agreed to meet the challenges to fill the void. We are most grateful to both of them, for providing the leadership that was so badly required at that critical juncture. We most respectfully and thankfully record our gratitude to them and would place it on record for the prosperity to remember.

This triggered off a spontaneous and well directed effort to mobilize the ex-servicemen on one platform.

The political events of 2007, led to the formation of Pakistan Ex Servicemen Association. General Parvez Musharraf's act in November, 2007 to remove Chief Justice of Pakistan Mr. Iftikhar Ahmed Choudhry caused great upheaval and turmoil in the country. The lawyer's movement was in the forefront of struggle for the restoration of the Chief Justice. Another factor which contributed towards the unrest in the civil society and political parties was the policies of Musharraf on so called "War on Terror" His decision to carry out the operations against the tribes in FATA at the behest of USA, led to

Series of suicide attacks specifically directed against Pakistan Armed Forces, especially the Army. The situation further aggravated when General Parvez Musharraf on 03 Nov 2007 abrogated the constitution and dismissed judges of the superior court, including the Chief Justice and placed them under house arrest along with their families. Under the garb of emergency, which in fact was Martial Law, he clamped restrictions on media and political parties and arrested several hundred activists.

It was against this background that on 12 Jan 2008, a few senior retired officers got together and decided to play their role to safeguard the image of the Armed Forces. The Ex-servicemen held their first seminar on 20th Jan 2008 at Hotel Shalimar which was presided over by Air Marshal (Retd) M. Asghar Khan and Air Marshal (Retd) Nur Khan. This was attended by over 200 ex-servicemen, which included several retired Service Chiefs, several three and two star Generals and some officers who were veterans of 1965 war; amongst which three had the distinction of holding the decoration of SJ Bar. In a unanimous resolution adopted, they demanded the removal of General Parvez Musharraf from the position of COAS and the restoration of the Judiciary to pre 03 November, 2007 position.

Simultaneously, the Ex-Servicemen supported the Lawyers movement and participated in the long march in June, 2008. After the long march, it was realized that Ex-Servicemen movement, needs to be organized on proper and permanent footings. It was, therefore, decided to form a separate Association which was named as Pakistan Ex-servicemen Association. The Aims and Objectives of the Association and other details are stated in the Memorandum of Association. We are grateful to Major General (Retd) A. A. Zuberi, for his thoughtful and dedicated effort to compile a very comprehensive Memorandum of Association.

The next press Conference was held at Margalla Hotel in Islamabad and Air Marshal (Retd) M. Asghar, briefly explained the reasons as to why Ex-Servicemen are actively launching this movement against General Parvez Musharraf. He opined that all the Martial Laws in the past have caused more damage to the country, and rather than solve the

problems they set out to do so; they in fact left a plethora of problems in the wake of it. He emphasized that it is time that the Nation must reject all acts of Military Adventurism. He cited an example of his own career in the Indian Air Force, when the Hur movement was started in Sindh, and he was ordered to strafe the advancing column. He explained that when he was overhead this column, he saw that it had mostly women and children in it. Seeing this, he had no heart to carry out the mission assigned to him and instead abandoned it. When he was questioned by the Senior British Army officer's about not carrying out his mission on the orders given to him, he explained his reasons for it. They had to accept it as it was considered an illegal order. Drawing an analogy, he emphasized that illegal orders should never be accepted.

After this a Seminar was held in the Pearl Continental Hotel, Rawalpindi on Kashmir issue. Due to the absence of Air Marshal (Retd) M. Asghar Khan, Lieutenant General (Retd) Faiz Ali Chistie presided the function. Some over Two Hundred veterans attended the function which included some prominent civilians too. Roedad Khan gave an emotional address in which he also condemned the curse of Martial Laws. As the Seminar concluded, in an abrupt decision, the participants decided to move up to GHQ. Carrying the banners for the removal of General Parvez Musharraf, they vociferously protested at the gate of GHQ. It also helped in conveying a message to top military Brass. This can be best described by an article published by an American Journalist Carlotta Gall. The same she sent in an e-mail, addressed to Lieutenant General (Retd) Ali Kuli Khan. It is placed below for record.

***“February 6, 2008 Military Retirees Demand Musharraf’s Resignation. By CARLOTTA GALL and SALMAN MASOOD RAWALPINDI, Pakistan — Several hundred retired generals, admirals and servicemen gathered Tuesday for the third time in two weeks in this military town and demanded the resignation of General Parvez Musharraf in an unprecedented public protest, a retired army chief, one retired Naval Chief and several retired generals and dozens of former servicemen came out onto the main road chanting and shouting against Mr Musharraf. Just two weeks after they first assembled on January 22nd and wrote a resolution calling on Mr Musharraf to resign, the retired officer’s movement is starting to build momentum and appears poised to take over where the lawyer’s movement, with its main leaders under house arrest had stalled. The campaign was also to warn the government not to try to interfere in the parliamentary elections on February, 18th. The retired officers met for a seminar about Kashmir, the territory that Pakistan and India claim, organized by Pakistan Ex-Servicemen’s Society, which cares for the welfare of retired military personnel, in a hotel near the Army General Headquarters. The speeches soon turned political, taking aim at Mr Musharraf, blaming him for abandoning Kashmir, stifling an independent judiciary and perpetuating his one-man rule. He has messed things up; look at law and order, said Lieutenant General Jamshed Gulzar Kiani, a retiree who was the Corps Commander of Rawalpindi, one of the most important posts in the army, under Mr Musharraf when he was Commanding General of the armed forces. The rash of suicide bombings and the fighting raging in two of Pakistan’s four provinces were the main concerns the former generals raised. Mr Kiani said that Mr Musharraf gave an elaborate seven-point order of action when he seized power in 1999, but that after eight years he had not delivered on any of them. Where is the interprovincial harmony? He asked. Where is law and order? Even the economy is going down with escalating food prices. The net result of the eight-year rule is a complete mess-up of the country. Another former general, Ali Kuli Khan, which was passed over for the top army job when Mr Musharraf was appointed to it in 1998, expressed his frustration with a cricket term. We are here to bring the lesson home that you have had enough of an innings, he said, and unless you back off it will not be possible for things to calm down. The outbursts, by traditionally loyal and discreet men of the armed forces, represent yet another sign of the growing resentment in*”**

Pakistan against Mr Musharraf, whose popularity has plunged since last March, when he dismissed the chief justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry. The disaffection has grown sharply since November, 3, when Mr Musharraf imposed Martial Law to see through his own election to another Presidential term. Since the 27 December, assassination of Benazir Bhutto, the Country has been in a tail spin. Second Tenure of Nawaz Sharif saw further turmoil and General Parvez Musharraf imposed his infamous Martial Law. Last month the former servicemen issued a statement urging Mr Musharraf to resign and hand over power to Mr Chaudhry, who has been under house arrest since Nov. 3. Mr Musharraf, who was in Europe at the time, attacked his detractors. "They are insignificant personalities." The Financial Times quoted him as saying in an interview at the Davos World Economic Forum. "Most of them are ones who served under me, and I kicked them out."

Most of the retired officers at the meeting dismissed his remarks by saying that they considered him a junior officer. Mr Kiani, who had served under General Musharraf, said the ex-servicemen supporting the movement were now far more than the original 100 who signed a statement last month calling for him to step down. The general's movement is important because Mr Musharraf is more likely to listen to his peers, several at the meeting said. "This development and their involvement are unprecedented," said Roedad Khan, a retired senior bureaucrat who was a guest speaker at the seminar. "This is bound to change the course of events, and very soon." As he arrived, he was welcomed by one of the organizer's, who exclaimed that the servicemen wanted to draw him in. This sudden demonstration of the Veterans condemning General Musharraf, rattled him and he lost all sense of balance of mind."

In a fit of frenzy, at a hurried press conference that he held at Davos, he termed these highly respectable Senior Officers as, "They are insignificant personalities. They are spent cartridges. I kicked them out of the Service."

This imbecile hardly realized that most of those standing against him were much senior to him; some had been the Chiefs of various services, and in the way of their bravery and gallantry, three heroes' stood holding the award of SJ & Bar. In comparison, he hardly had anything to show for

himself, except for the absurd waving of his close fist as a commando; having no record of significance.

After all these events, the General Body Meeting was held in early 2008, and Admiral (Retd) Fasih Bokhari was elected as the first President of the Association. Vice Admiral (Retd) Ahmad Tasnim was elected as the Senior Vice- President and the name of Brig (Retd) Mian Muhammad Mahmud was approved as the Executive Vice-President. Brig (Retd) Abdus Salam Akhtar had the distinction to be elected as the first General Secretary of PESA. Some over 500 Members joined soon after, which included Air Marshal M.Asghar Khan and Air Marshal (Retd) M. Nur Khan. Amongst the other notable were, Lieut General (Retd) Hameed Gul and Lieut General (Retd) Asad Durrani, both Ex DG ISI. Lieut General (Retd) Abdul Qayum, Ex Chairman Pakistan Steel Corporation, was also a very active member. But the most distinctive feature of the alumnus was that, in Vice Admiral (Retd) Ahmad Tasnim, Major General (Retd) N.K.Babar and Brig (Retd) Mohammad Taj, three illustrious names who were holding the Gallantry Awards of SJ Bar, were amongst our members.

With dynamic efforts of Admiral (Retd) Fasih Bokhari, PESA was made very active and vibrant. Membership drive picked up momentum and we had over 20,000 members enrolled. We organized a Lahore Chapter, which had some very eminent civilians, who became our Honorary Members, and who made a tremendous contribution. Notable mention must be made of Munir Ahmad, who had been Chief Secretary in both Baluchistan and N.W.F.P, and retired as Secretary Ministry of Information. Shamshad Ahmad, Ex-Foreign Secretary, was very active and he still is, as he is regularly in touch with us, and we are exchanging views on regular basis. Ghulam Yazdani, Ex Chairman FBR and several retired Inspector Generals of police were also regular participants. Unfortunately, all of them, except Shamshad Ahmad have since died and their wisdom and experience is denied to us.

With the personal efforts of Admiral (Retd) Fasih Bokhari, a presentation was arranged with the PML (N) leadership in the Punjab House. Mian Nawaz Sharif and most of his Ex Ministers attended. Air Marshal (Retd) Masud Akhtar made gave a detailed and very comprehensive briefing on the National Security Policy of Pakistan. It gave guidance for: -

- 1. Reducing insurgency to Zero.**
- 2. Need for defining our National Identity and one Common Purpose.**
- 3. Six vital National Interests.**

Brig (Retd) Mahmud also gave his overview of the Geo-Strategic situation of the region and threat perception that Pakistan faces. These briefing were Very highly appreciated by all the participants and Nawaz Sharif also was very complimentary and expressed his gratification for the excellent presentation.

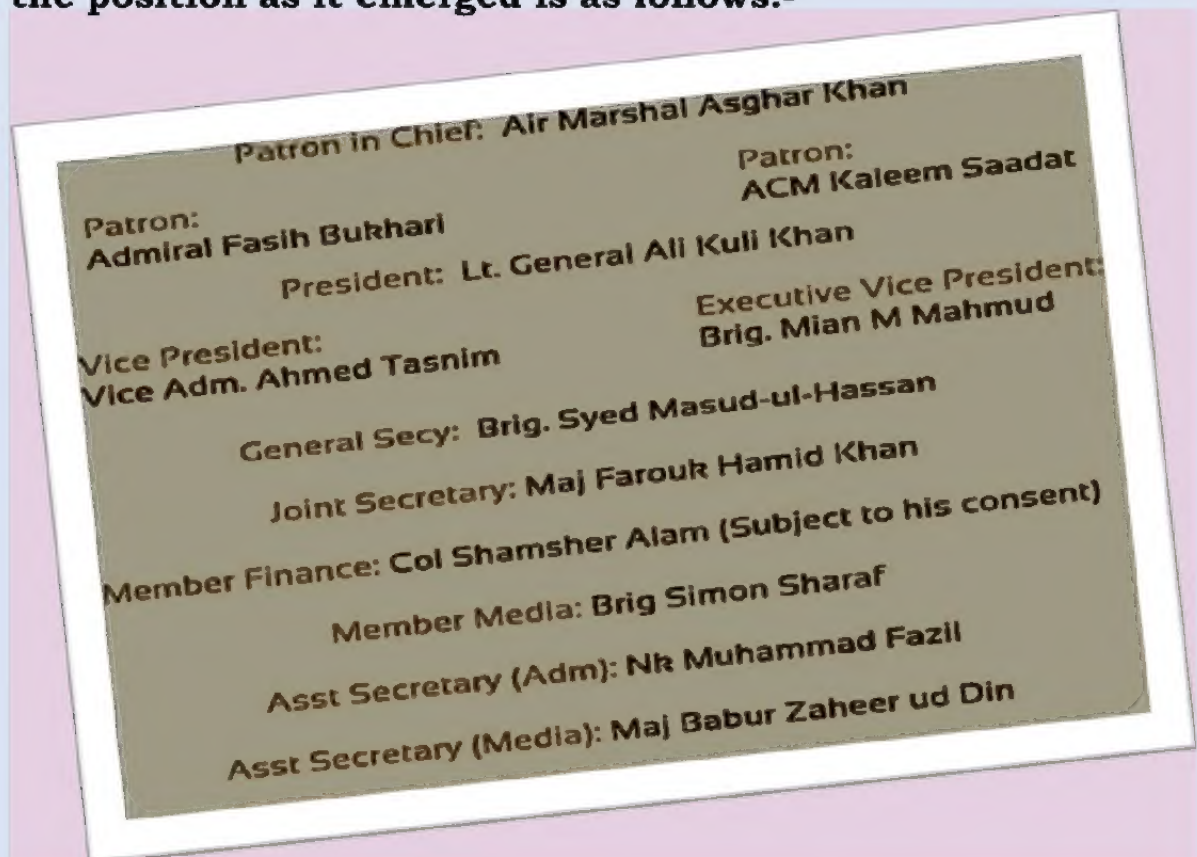
In another interlude, Brig (Retd) Mahmud arranged another briefing to the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Shah Mahmud Qureshi. For this meeting, PESA team was led by Admiral (Retd) Fasih Bokhari and included Air Chief Marshal (Retd) Kaleem Saadat. Brig (Retd) Mian Mahmud, Brig (Retd) Masud-ul-Hassan and Brig (Retd) Simon Sharaf. In this meeting a very comprehensive threat analysis to Pakistan was presented. Shah Mahmud Qureshi was most excited about this briefing and expressed his desire that we should have another one full day long session in the Foreign Office, in which he will have all the team of Foreign Office present. He also suggested that he will give us five hours for a detailed presentation and then will have an open Question and Answer session. But then he opined that real foreign policy is evolved at GHQ and we should first inter act with our old colleagues in the Army.

It was on 17th October 2011 that Admiral (Retd) Fasih Bokhari was appointed as Chairman NAB. He resigned from his position as President PESA, and in his place Air Chief Marshal (Retd) Kaleem Saadat, was elected as President of PESA. With his wealth of experience, his deep inside knowledge of affairs and his visionary mind, he continued to guide PESA in the furtherance of the objective of PESA as enshrined in our Memorandum of Association. This role he played very devotedly and allowed the members full freedom of speech. This at times resulted in very rowdy discussions, which would annoy him sometimes, but he kept patient and allowed free discussions. Due to his various other commitments he expressed his inability to continue as President of PESA

At a General Body meeting of the Association, Lieutenant General (Retd) Ali Kuli Khan was unanimously elected as the next President of PESA. Though Vice Admiral (Retd) Ahmad Tasnim was senior to him, but he deferred his name in favor of Lieutenant General (Retd) Ali Kuli Khan, as he strongly felt that this position should now rotate to the Army. This magnanimous gesture of Vice Admiral (Retd) Ahmad Tasnim was highly Appreciated by all.

It was also decided that because of the close patronage extended by Air Marshal (Retd) M. Asghar Khan to our Association, he must be offered a life time position as Patron in Chief. This he graciously accepted. In recognition of this a shield was presented to him on behalf of PESA.

In recognition of the Services made by Admiral (Retd) Fasih Bokhari and Air Chief Marshal (Retd) Kaleem Saadat, they both were made Patrons. With these decisions taken and after the elections in the General Body Meeting, the position as it emerged is as follows:-



On 20 Nov 2016, at the Annual General Body Meeting of PESA it was unanimously approved to follow the worldwide practice of using the term 'Veterans' instead of ex-servicemen for retired personnel of armed forces. Accordingly, it was proposed to change name of PESA.

The press release so issued stated:

“After considering various suggestions, the Executive Council has decided to rename PESA as Veterans of Pakistan (VOP). Its basic objectives towards national affairs will remain unchanged. It will also facilitate link up with Veterans’ organizations of friendly countries. Contacts with Veterans organization of Peoples Army of China has already been established since their delegation has already visited Pakistan and met officials of PESA.

A countrywide campaign shall now be started to encourage retired personnel of all ranks of the armed forces of Pakistan to join VOP. This will make its voice more effective to serve Pakistan and look after welfare of the retired servicemen.”

...Concluded